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ABSTRACT

Lakeland Community College (LCC) (Ohio) has begun a work-study program for its students to become reading tutors for students in grades kindergarten through five at local schools. The program offers quality reading tutorials for local elementary students as well as training for community college students who wish to become educators after graduation. Guidelines are set forth by the America Reads Program, initiated by former President Bill Clinton. A Job Location Development (JLD) Coordinator was hired and supported through federal funding to initiate the program. Details regarding transportation, safety, facilities, documentation, hours, costs, and parental information were carefully assessed by a team of LCC and local elementary school coordinators and reading specialists. The JLD then interviewed and selected tutors from LCC. Tutoring is done one on one, with a supervising specialist present. Tutors develop their own lesson plans and carefully evaluate them before putting them into action. Training is provided before and after tutoring sessions. Over 200 students from neighboring elementary schools have been tutored, and more than 80 Lakeland students have been employed through the program. Information and advice for starting such a program are discussed in the closing of the document. (CJW)

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"America Reads": An Opportunity to Learn, Serve, and Teach

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"America Reads": An Opportunity to Learn, Serve, and Teach

Introduction:

In 1997, the Career Services department of Lakeland Community College initiated a position to develop innovative and service-oriented work/study employment for Lakeland students. Utilizing "America Reads" guidelines and in cooperation with the Lakeland Learning Center and a local elementary school, a program was implemented to train Lakeland students as reading tutors for students in grades K-5.

The Lakeland "America Reads" program results in a quality reading tutorial for local students and training in reading activities for work-study students who may become future educators and/or parents. It also provides neighborhood exposure to college facilities, support of community learning at all levels, and diverse use of Lakeland's Learning Center's space and technical resources.

Developing innovative campus employment:

Education does not take place only in the classroom of a college. Part of the college experience is exposure to new ideas, new people and new environments. Lakeland Community College decided that work-study positions should be developed that provide opportunities for new and diverse experiences as well. A federal work study program funded a part-time Job Location Development Coordinator (JLD) specifically to expand work/study offerings by bringing President Clinton's "America Reads" initiative to Lakeland's Campus. The JLD coordinator met with college personnel to spearhead this

project. At the same time, faculty from Lakeland's Learning Center had expressed an interest in participating in the "America Reads" movement having witnessed first-hand the frustration of college students who had poor reading skills.

The fortuitous timing of the Career Services initiative concomitant with the federal emphasis on early intervention for literacy and the local schools' concern regarding reading proficiency paved the way for this collaborative project. A team consisting of the JLD coordinator for Career Services, the director of the Learning Center, a Lakeland reading specialist, the local school's Title I reading specialist and the elementary school principal met over several months to work out details of transportation, safety, facilities, documentation, hours, costs, and parental information and involvement. The JLD coordinator advertised for, interviewed, selected and processed the tutors. The Lakeland Learning Center became the "home" of the project. The Learning Center provided not only tutorial space in an adjacent classroom, but as importantly, offered use of stations in the tutorial computer lab.

The "America Reads" program at Lakeland Community College supports the college's mission of commitment to student development through a challenging professional employment opportunity. The program model consists of an on-campus reading clinic, employing 8-10 student workers as one-on-one tutors under the constant supervision of the Reading Specialist. The supervising specialist designed 12 hours of initial tutor training with a minimum of 8 hours follow-up training. She provided mountains of

educational samples, ideas, materials, computer resources, and, of course, books for Lakeland work-study reading tutors.

The impact of the teaching experience:

The Lakeland "America Reads" program deliberately targets students with diverse backgrounds, educational goals, and tutoring experience. The goal of the program for Lakeland students is to give them the opportunity to experience the personal rewards associated with successful teaching. Student tutors develop comprehensive lesson plans for each tutoring session focusing on whole language and experiential educational approaches. Tutors evaluate each lesson plan targeting acquisition of new vocabulary, engagement in the learning process, and evidence of critical thinking skills. Follow-up training is based upon individual tutor needs in developing instructional, management, or interpersonal skills. Positive impacts noted by the tutor evaluations included establishing a close relationship with a child, feeling of personal accomplishment, gaining skills and knowledge in "whole language" reading activities, enhancing planning and time management skills, opportunity to interact as "adults" with parents, gaining skills in computer tutorials, and building teamwork skills with other student tutors.

The goal of the one-on-one tutoring is to develop positive attitudes of elementary students toward reading and their own reading abilities. Changes in students' and parental attitudes are captured in mid-term and quarterly program evaluations. Progress reports in reading achievement at the elementary school are shared monthly with the reading tutors.

Consistently, parents of students in the program note that their child reads more spontaneously and initiates reading activities at home.

Since it s inception in Spring of 1998, Lakeland "America Reads" has tutored over 200 students in grades K-4 from 6 neighboring elementary schools. The program has provided for over 1500 hours of tutoring and runs year round on the Lakeland campus. Over 80 Lakeland students have been employed through this program.

Getting Started:

"America Reads" is a national initiative that takes many forms across the United States and across institutions. The Lakeland Community Colleges version of the program combines the JLD funds available nationally through Financial Aid, federal work-study and institutional work-study funds, and in-kind support for space, materials and program supervision. Colleges can begin by earmarking JLD funds for "America Reads" program development. Start small, target a single elementary school. Seek donations from libraries, businesses, parents and businesses. Other sources of tutor funding can include Americorps grants, VISTA funds and corporate sponsorship. Recently, several states, including Ohio, have initiated state-supported reading programs. Lakeland is the recent recipient of an "Ohio Reads" grant to pay non-federal work-study wages and buy laptop computers. For more information contact the AmericaReads Website: www.ed.gov/inits/americareads.

It only takes the commitment and creativity of a few key persons at each institution to produce a quality project. At Lakeland, that commitment then spread unexpectedly to include faculty and staff volunteer tutors, additional financial support, expanded parental involvement, and additional school partners. Lessons learned and procedures developed from a small operation are easily adapted to more sweeping programs when the opportunity arises. Meanwhile, a worthwhile project can be started on a limited budget with shoestring resources. The most valuable resource for any "America Reads" program is bright and eager college students, and in this regard, every college has "deep pockets."